



THE PUBLIC   
EDUCATION PROMISE

# Bringing The Public Education Promise to Life

AN ACTION GUIDE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS NATIONWIDE

# Introduction

The future of public education is not a question of policy, but one of promise. Communities, families, business leaders, educators, and students are asking for something bigger than incremental reform. They want schools that ignite hope, build resilience, and equip every learner with the life skills and confidence to navigate life as adults.

The Public Education Promise is our bold commitment to deliver on that need. Grounded in the Future-Ready Framework that includes five principles that ensures every child is prepared for real life in the real world.

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## PRINCIPLE 1:

### Prioritize Student-Centered Learning

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## PRINCIPLE 2:

### The New Basics: Real Skills for Real Life

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## PRINCIPLE 3:

### Attract, Hire, Retain, and Reward the Best People

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## PRINCIPLE 4:

### Build Highly Engaged Family, Community, and Business Partnerships

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## PRINCIPLE 5:

### Measure What Matters

But a promise is only as strong as the action behind it. That is why AASA's District Services—rooted in the Portrait of a Graduate—exist. These services give districts and communities the tools, strategies, and support to live the Promise, not just talk about it.

This action guide shows how The Public Education Promise can be activated through AASA District Services, mapping each offering to the five principles. The goal is simple: to move from vision to impact, ensuring every child, in every community, benefits from a future-ready education.

# A Bold Commitment, A Shared Future

Public education is at a crossroads. Too often, national debate reduces it to test scores, budgets, or compliance. But communities know better. They know public education is about something deeper: giving every child access to a quality K-12 education, providing them with a sense of safety and belonging, and preparing them to succeed in life after graduation.

The Portrait of a Graduate is the vehicle that can activate this Promise at the local level. When co-created with the community, it becomes a shared, unifying vision of what success looks like for every student. Then, additional services guide districts in aligning systems and practices, ensuring that the Promise is lived in every classroom, every day, for every child.

AASA's District Services are how leaders deliver on this public commitment. They provide the strategy, frameworks, coaching, and communication tools to help districts move boldly from aspiration to action.



## THE PUBLIC EDUCATION PROMISE

# Students and Teachers Bring the Portrait to Life

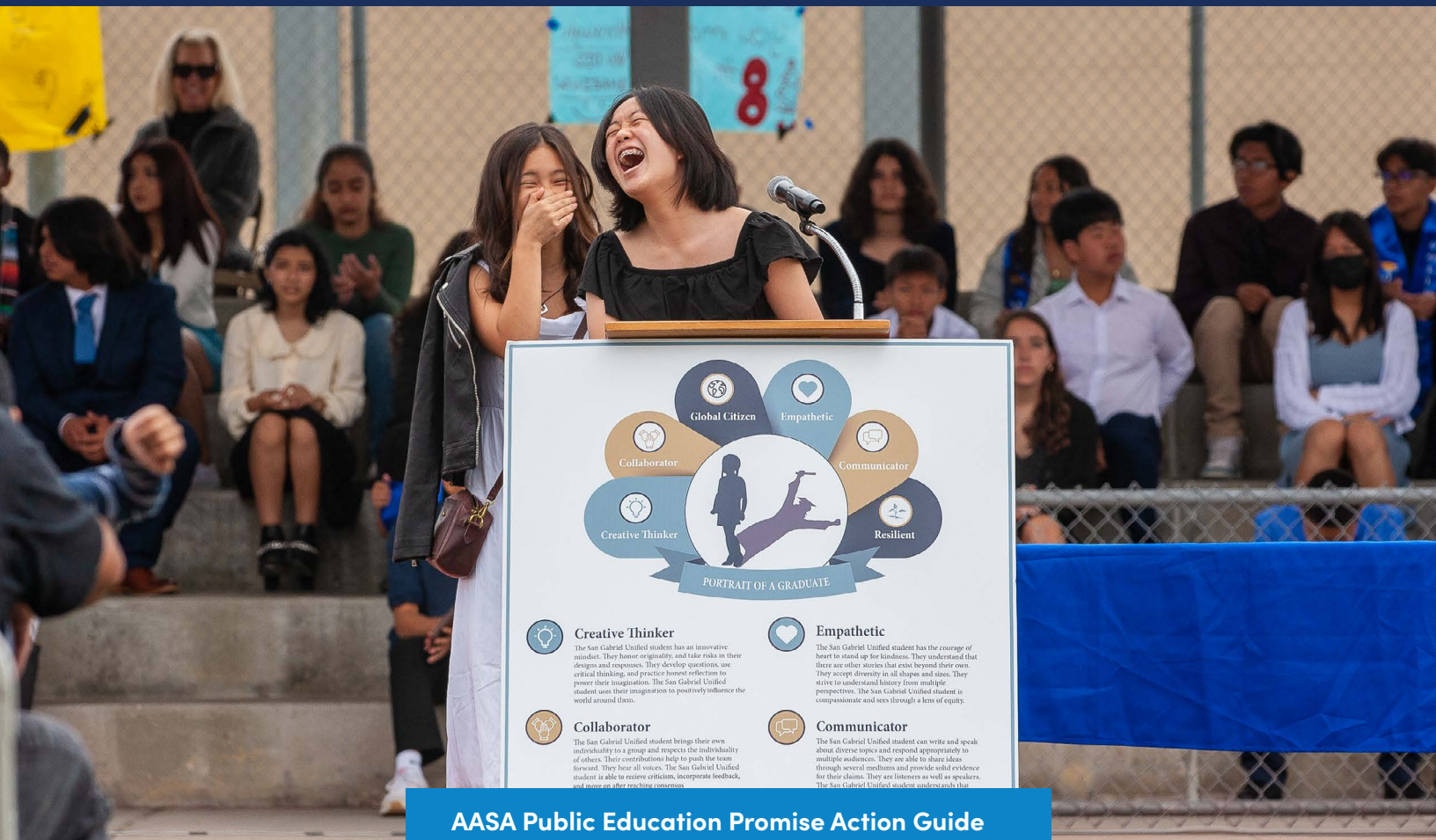
## SAN GABRIEL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (CALIFORNIA)

*“Above all, our work is about seeing that all students reach their greatest potential while maintaining wellness and discovering their passions in a safe, welcoming, and nurturing environment.”*

**- Dr. Gary Thomas Scott, Governing Board of Education Member**

Students have been an integral part of the process in putting the community’s vision into practice—from serving on the team that developed their competencies to helping to create the Strategic Plan that is anchored in the district’s Portrait.

The district has also ensured that teachers were part of the process and began honoring teachers who guide students in their Portrait of a Graduate journey and exemplify the competencies with a new honor, the Portrait of an Educator designation.



# AASA District Services

## SUPPORT FOR EVERY STEP OF THE JOURNEY

AASA District Services are organized into three areas that align to the Future-Ready Framework principles and help to bring the Public Education Promise to life:

## Readiness

### CO-CREATE THE VISION AND BUILD TRUST

#### Portrait of a Graduate

Engages the community to help define and shape a shared, bold vision for its students. A well-developed Portrait articulates the essential life skills students need to thrive in life, career, and community.

#### Community Compass

Engage stakeholders in a shared conversation about the future of learning. Designed to foster compelling dialogues, the experience empowers varied groups within your community to forge a united vision, shared commitments, and a collective drive toward preparing every child for college, career, and real life in the real world.

#### Strategic Planning

A human-centered and dynamic approach to planning strategy designed to help school districts move beyond compliance-driven planning and into meaningful, future-focused transformation.

#### Readiness Branding & Communications

Craft a compelling narrative to rally support and anchor all communications in a shared story of why the future-ready work the district engages in matters. A full suite of services to support districts as they prepare to launch their Portraits, strategic plans, and more.

#### Roadmap

This service supports district leadership teams in creating a clear, actionable Roadmap to bring their Portrait of a Graduate to life. Through this process, participants explore the shifts in mindsets, practices, and systems required for student-centered learning. They collaboratively identify potential on-ramps, detours, and roadblocks, enabling them to design an intentional, systemic approach to achieving their vision.



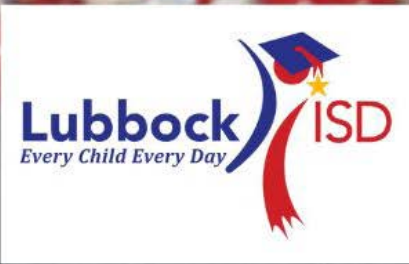
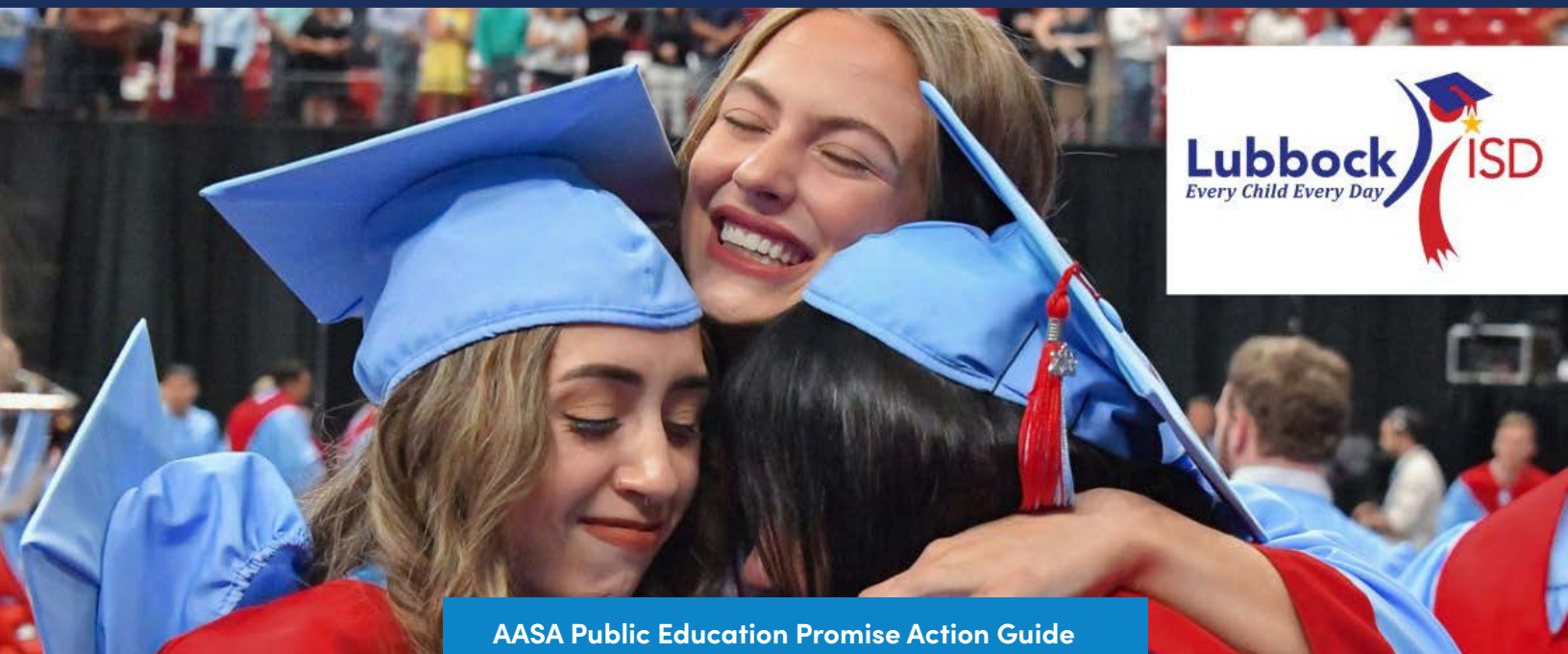
# Strategic Plan Aligns with Portrait and Whole Child Approach

## LUBBOCK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (TEXAS)

*“The strategic planning process helped us narrow our focus on a series of deliverable goals that strengthen our core beliefs and ensure our students graduate with the skills they need to succeed, no matter which path they choose to pursue.”*

**- Dr. Kathy Rollo | Superintendent**

- Lubbock Independent School District (ISD) prioritized completing its comprehensive strategic plan during the 2020–21 school year.
- During a time that demanded so much in-the-moment thinking, the strategic plan was an opportunity to step back, think about the big picture, and create a path forward. Anchored in its Portrait of a Graduate, the district’s strategic plan placed students at the center of all its work.
- In its Portrait of a Graduate, the district identified the skills and mindsets that align with the district philosophy that supports the whole-child approach to education, such as adaptability, creativity, and critical thinking.
- The Lubbock ISD Portrait competencies do not only relate to academics; they underscore the importance of a well-rounded educational experience.



# Alignment

## ENSURE COHERENCE ACROSS THE SYSTEM

### Portraits of Educators

Both Portrait of an Educator and Portrait of a Leader helps align staff with the Portrait of a Graduate life skills. The process of developing one or both reveals the support the district needs to provide for educators and leaders as they shift practices and build capacity in concert with the Portrait of a Graduate.

### Frameworks for Learning

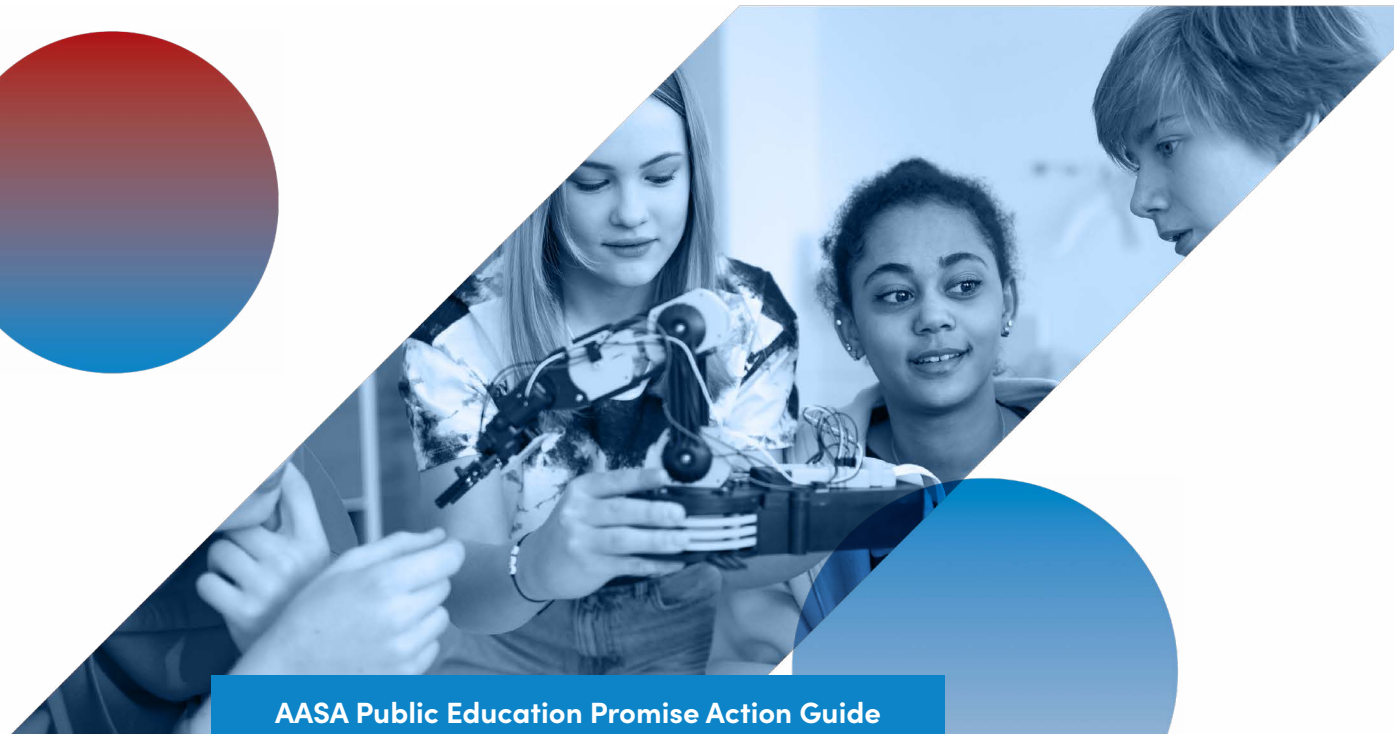
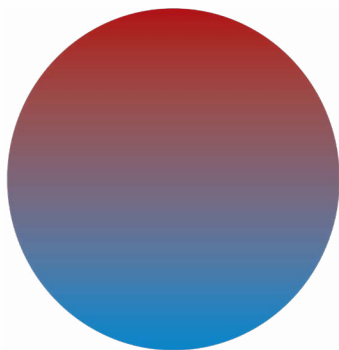
A learning framework that sets the stage for changes in student-centered learning experiences and measurement in the district. This service is key to systemic alignment of academic standards and life skills. It helps connect disparate district priorities and provides an opportunity to create coherence in approaches to learning across the district.

### Learning Experience Accelerator for Teachers

Build teacher capacity for deeper, student-centered learning. This collaborative and personalized process helps design and build the capacity of teachers for deeper, student-centered learning. It includes instructional design, learner engagement, an introduction to performance tasks, and strategies for creating conditions for learning around hope, resilience, and belonging.

### Alignment Branding & Communications

Create messaging and toolkits that ensure consistency of narrative and storytelling across the district. These services support the effective use of communications during the Portrait implementation process.



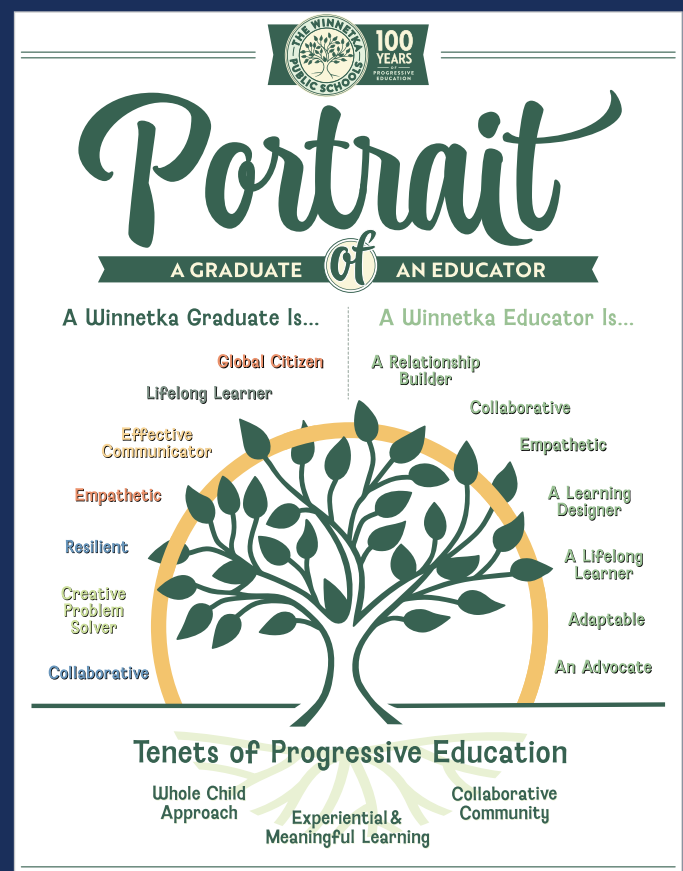
# Honoring the Past, Planning for the Future

## WINNETKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (ILLINOIS)

*“We first established the key competencies for students as they progress through our school system. Having those as a foundation helped us then develop the educator competencies that we felt aligned with getting students to attain and advance in those critical areas.”*

**-Jeff Knapp | Assistant Superintendent of Professional Learning and Human Resources.**

- The Winnetka Public Schools District 36 has deep roots in progressive education. For more than a century, this educational philosophy – learning by doing – has informed the district’s practices of differentiated instruction and project-based learning.
- With such a strong reputation as a progressive school system, it was important to integrate the district’s history when developing a Portrait of a Graduate. The district’s history also influenced the creation of its Portrait of an Educator. Both Portraits are displayed in one unified graphic that tells a story about Winnetka and the importance they place on students, educators, and their community.
- Seeing both the Portrait of a Graduate and Portrait of an Educator side-by-side in the same graphic rounds out the complete picture along with the district’s Progressive Education tenets. The logo is a quick point of reference in every classroom now in the district. It is a tool that tells a story about Winnetka and the importance the district and community place on students, educators, and the community as a whole.



# Activation

## DELIVER ON THE PROMISE AND MAKE IT VISIBLE

### Measure What Matters

Design meaningful ways to capture student growth beyond test scores. Through rubric design, performance tasks, and cornerstone/capstone design, this service engages educators and leaders to collaborate in the creation of a purposeful system of measurement.

### Activation Branding & Communications

Support for creating brand design assets and messaging to effectively share impact stories and progress with clarity and purpose.

### Impact Showcases

Too often, once a district launches its Portrait of a Graduate, the challenge becomes, how do we turn the impact of our Portrait into powerful public traditions—student showcases, discovery fairs, or annual celebrations? This service helps school districts design, plan, and promote events and campaigns with expert consulting, toolkits, and brand design support.



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# Aligning Curriculum to the Graduate Profile: A Districtwide Strategy for Student Success

## HOWARD-SUAMICO SCHOOL DISTRICT (WISCONSIN)

*“Our story is ongoing, but the alignment of curriculum to the Graduate Profile has demonstrated to be a high-leverage strategy—one that activates shared ownership, provides coherence, and ensures that all students have access to the learning that will prepare them for their future.”*

**-Amanda Waldo | Director of Teaching & Learning**

- The district started its Graduate Profile journey with a commitment: every student will experience learning that makes the Graduate Profile authentic, connected, and measurable. The entrance strategy focused on a core move—aligning their curriculum system to the Graduate Profile.
- From this foundation, the district collectively continues to build curriculum frameworks for every subject and at every grade level. These frameworks are not rigid pacing guides, but instead are designed to support authentic learning environments, where students apply what they know in context and receive feedback on both academic content and Graduate Profile characteristics.
- Before this work, the district observed powerful pockets of authentic, student-centered learning across the district, but these experiences were inconsistent. By grounding the Graduate Profile in curriculum frameworks, Howard-Suamico is building a system in which those experiences are no longer the exception but the expectation.



# Mapping AASA District Services to the Five Principles

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### Prioritize Student-Centered Learning

Portrait of a Graduate | Strategic Planning | Roadmap  
Frameworks for Learning | Learning Experience Accelerator for Teachers  
Branding & Communications

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## PRINCIPLE 2:

### The New Basics: Real Skills for Real Life

Portrait of a Graduate | Community Compass  
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## PRINCIPLE 3:

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Portraits of Educators | Frameworks for Learning  
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Community Compass | Branding & Communications

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## PRINCIPLE 5:

### Measure What Matters

Measure What Matters | Impact Showcases  
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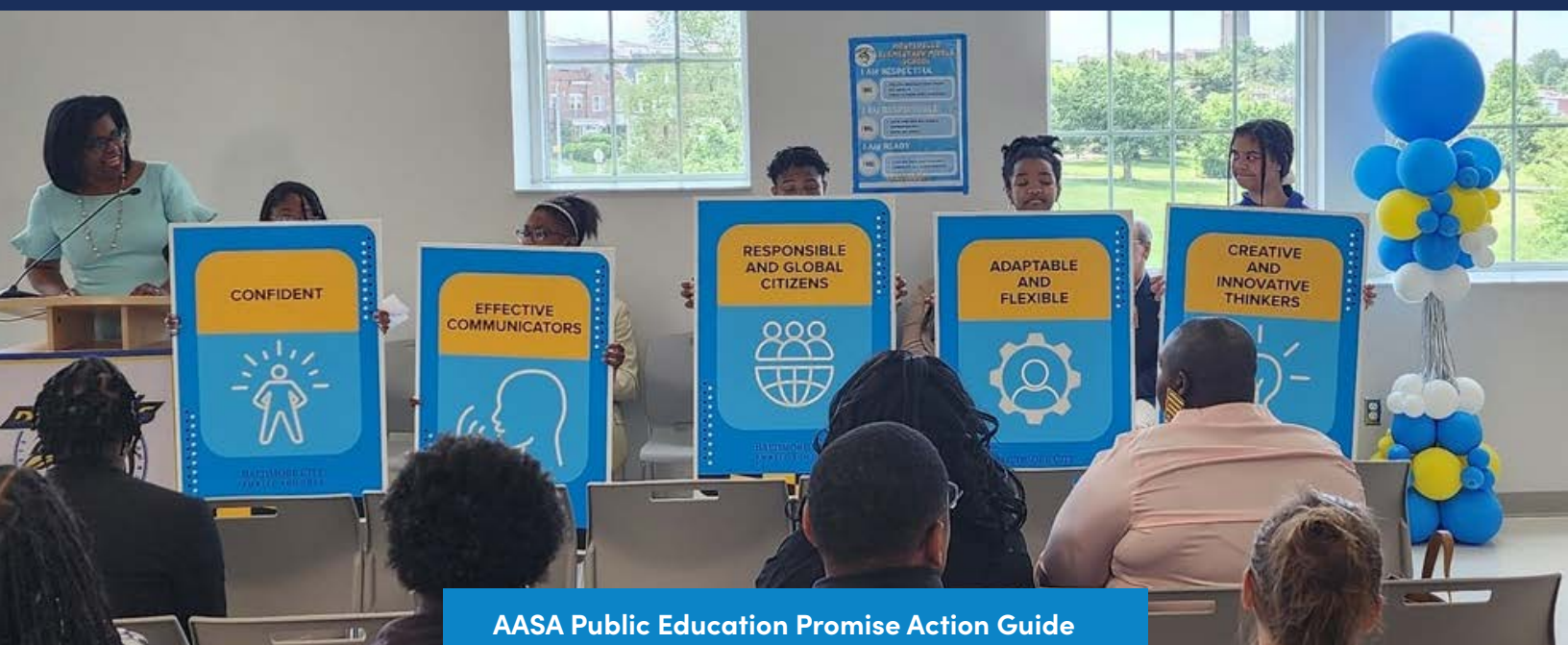
# Defining a Future-Ready Vision with Students at the Center

## BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MARYLAND)

*“[These competencies] are the skills our students can use no matter their goals or chosen pathways. Together they represent the portrait that should look back at us when a student earns their diploma.*

**-Sonja Brookins Santelises | Chief Executive Officer**

- One of the largest school systems in the United States, Baltimore City Public Schools launched its Portrait of a Graduate in 2024 representing a shared vision between the district and the surrounding community, articulating aspirations for all 75,000 Baltimore City students.
- City Schools, as the district is commonly known, started its transformation work by developing a strategic plan anchored in three key pillars: Academics, Leadership, and Student Wholeness. With these pillars as the foundation, the Portrait of a Graduate details how the district will provide resources, support, and opportunities to students, putting them in a position to succeed during their time in the district and after they graduate.
- “I had the pleasure of traveling to multiple schools within the district during my time as the Portrait of a Graduate facilitator for Baltimore City Public Schools,” said AASA Senior Director Jessica Harding. “The students were amazing and completely engaged in the work. Their conversations were powerful and gave me a window into how students feel about our ever-changing world and their place in it. It was wonderful to sit with students and listen as they shared the hopes and dreams they have for themselves and their peers.”



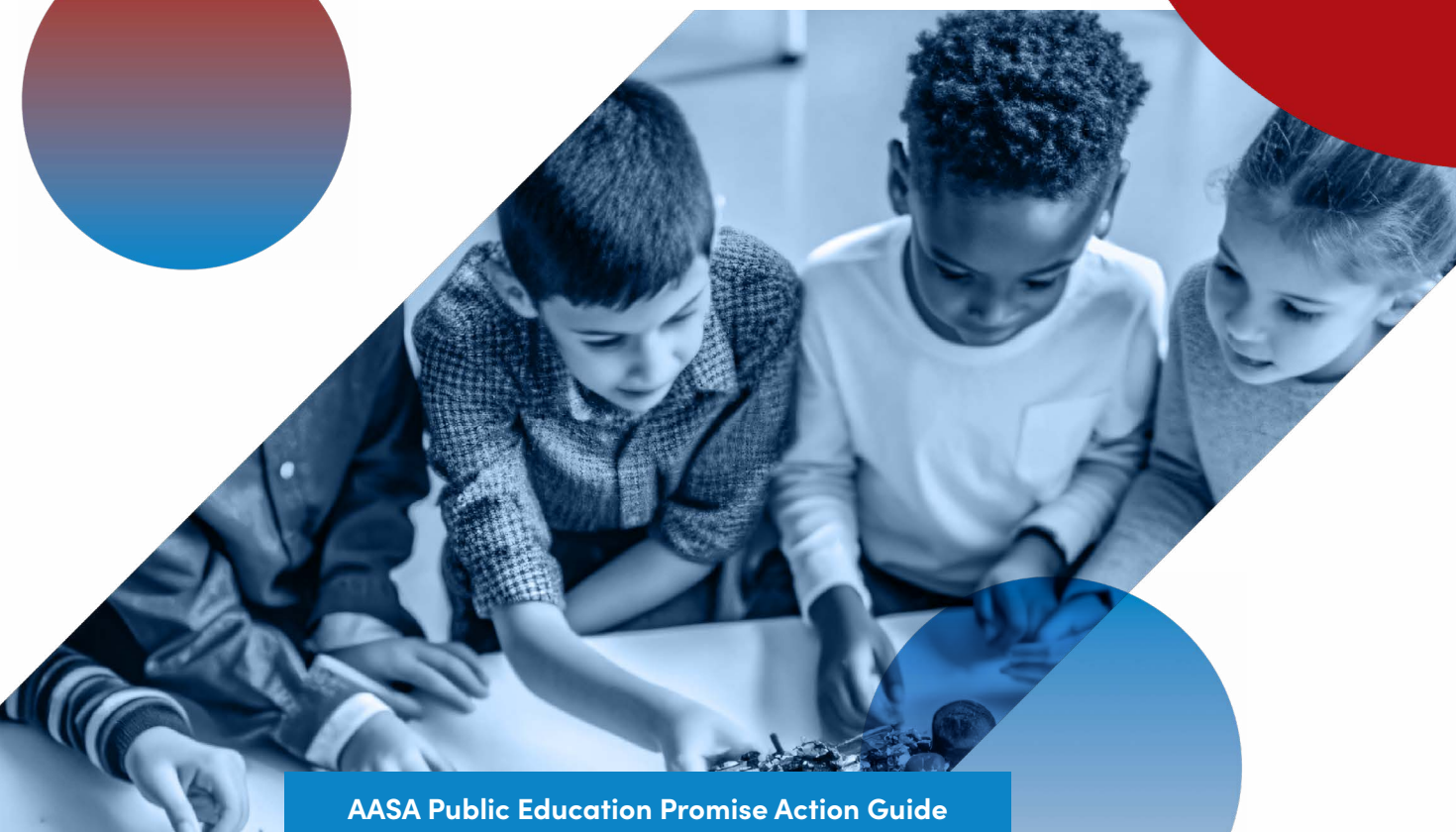
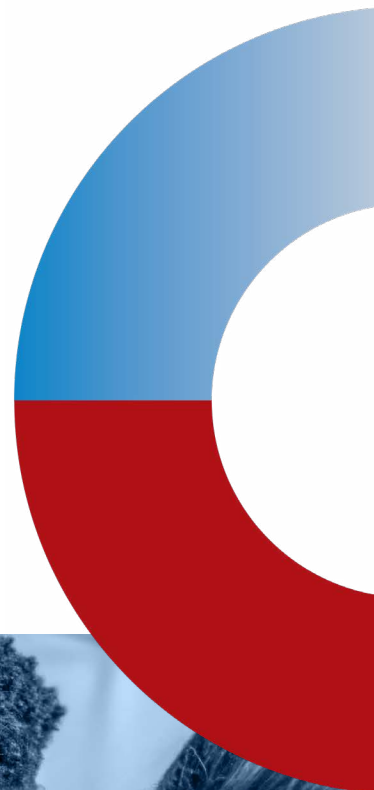
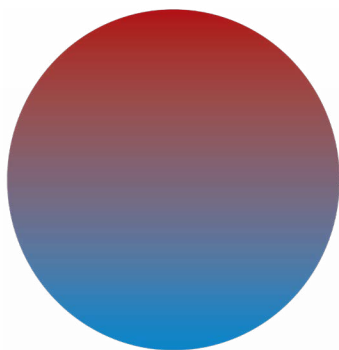
# Fulfilling the Promise

The Public Education Promise is more than a statement of values. It is a commitment to action.

By aligning the Future-Ready Framework with District Services, AASA is helping districts and communities keep the Promise. Together, we are building schools that are not only academically strong but also deeply human—places where students thrive, families feel connected, and communities see the future taking shape.

The Promise is clear. The framework provided. The services are ready. Now is the time to fulfill it—together.

Learn more about AASA  
District Services at [aasa.org/services](https://aasa.org/services)





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